

So That They May Live

By: Meagan McLaughlin

March 13, 2022. Today's sermon by Pastor Meagan is a reminder of how Jesus gave himself for us, for all people, for creation, so that one day the kinds of sacrifices we saw on 9/11, and see in the wildfires, the struggles for justice on the streets of our country, and the courageous stand of the Ukrainian people, will no longer be necessary.

Readings: [Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#), [Psalm 27](#), [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#), [Luke 13:31-35](#)

*** Transcript ***

Some of you may know how much I love Harry Potter. (For those who don't, you are about to find out.) Harry Potter is a wizard whose parents died when he was just a year old. For those who don't know the story, he lives with his aunt and uncle, who are Muggles — not wizards — and they led Harry to believe his whole life that his parents, James and Lily, had died in a car accident. But the truth is that they were murdered by Lord Voldemort, an evil wizard. Eventually, Harry learns that when the evil wizard Lord Voldemort came after them, James told Lily to grab Harry and run while he tried to hold Voldemort off on his own.

When Voldemort had killed James, Harry's father, he caught Harry and Lily, and he gave Lily a choice: stand aside, and you'll live. Harry's mother Lily stood in front of Harry, shielding him from Voldemort's curse in an effort to save his life. After killing Lily, Voldemort tries to kill Harry as well, but for the first time ever, he fails. Instead of killing Harry, Voldemort himself is hit by the curse, and Harry survives. No one seems to know why.

Ultimately, Harry finds out that Voldemort's curse failed because Lily had given up her life to save him. The protection of her love is so strong that it shields Harry not just that one time, but for his entire childhood, until he becomes an adult at the age of 17. Harry is alive because of his mother's love.

As we continue our Lenten journey in the wilderness of this beautiful and complicated world we live in, our gospel from Luke today tells us of Jesus grieving for Jerusalem. Jesus yearns, more than anything, to bring the beloved together — to gather them, not as a teacher gathers students or a general gathers soldiers or an employer gathers employees, but as a hen gathers her brood under her wing.

This is not a conquering love, but a love that is vulnerable, unfailing, and embracing. It is a love that carries Jesus toward Jerusalem, a place that he says kills its prophets. Jesus doesn't shy away from evil, destruction, and death, but walks towards it, even knowing that he will die in the process, even knowing how often we humans turn away from this vulnerable love and seek guarantees where there are none.

Jesus knows humanity has the capacity for incredible evil. Humans destroyed the Twin Towers and so many lives on 9/11. Humans wittingly and unwittingly lift up systemic evils like racism and economic oppression, act in disregard for creation. In the last few weeks, we have witnessed humans wreaking destruction and death on Ukraine, and pushing for laws that undermine the dignity and lives of trans people.

And we humans have the capacity to follow the way of Christ. And at times we sacrifice our own safety, well-being, and even our lives to embody the love of God in profound ways. First responders

ran into the burning towers on 9/11, many of them giving their lives that day and in the years since to save those trapped inside. Wildland firefighters in the West run toward the fires, to save people, animals, and the places they call home.

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and others with him, are staying and advocating and fighting in an effort to stand for justice and protect the most vulnerable in their communities who cannot leave, or don't want to. We may never know how many lives are saved because of their love.

Our human capacity for love like this is a reflection of the love of God revealed in Jesus: vulnerable, unfailing, embracing. It propels Jesus toward Jerusalem. And Jesus does not shy away from it but walks towards it, even knowing that he will die in the process. Jesus' love for us and creation reveals the love of God that will not, and cannot, fail. God's promise to us, echoed in the covenant made with Abram and Sarah, is life and abundance like the stars that can't be counted. The psalmist today sings of the safety and goodness of God's house, and Paul in his letter leans on that promise as he tells readers and us that we can stand firm in God. We, beloved, are alive because of the love of God that Jesus reveals.

We witness the brokenness of the world around us, and we witness the love of God in Christ echoed in the world among us in the actions of those who move toward brokenness and stand in the face of death as Jesus did. And it may sound a little radical but we need to know, beloved, that this is not God's dream for us. This is not God's dream for us.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem, people of Christ, not because God wanted Jesus to die, but because where there is brokenness, sin, violence, and death, God must be there. God is there. Jesus went to Jerusalem, toward the reality of death that awaited him, because there was no other way to embody the love of God for a people in pain.

Lily stood in front of the evil Voldemort knowing she would die, so that Harry might live. Jesus goes to Jerusalem knowing he would die, to embody the vulnerable, unfailing, embracing love of God that gives us life. And because of the resurrection, we know that even when we must confront the evil and death of our day, God's promise of life is sure.

Jesus gave himself for us, for all people, for creation, so that one day the kinds of sacrifices we saw on 9/11, and see in the wildfires, the struggles for justice on the streets of our country, and the courageous stand of the Ukrainian people, will no longer be necessary. Jesus gave himself for us, all the way to death, so that one day, the covenant God made with Abram, the promises of God claimed by the psalmist, and the assurance of Paul that God is faithful, will be fulfilled. Jesus gave himself for all of creation so that one day, all the brokenness of this world will be healed.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2022, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, YouTube, video, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 13:31-35, Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling